

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 00475 212313Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0475

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJECT: APEDE PROTEST MEETING LAST NIGHT: BUSINESS CLOSURES
SUBSEQUENT TO IT

REF: PANAMA 0441

1. SUMMARY: APEDE MEETING LAST NIGHT (JANUARY 20) IN PROTEST
AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S ARRESTS AND EXILE ORDER RESOLVED TO
CALL FOR AN INDEFINITE BUSINESS STOPPAGE UNTIL PRISONERS RE-
LEASED AND EXILES RETURN. END SUMMARY.

2. LAST NIGHT'S MEETING OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL
REPRESENTATIVES AT APEDE (PANAMANIAN ASSOCIATION OF
BUSINESS EXECUTIVES) HEADQUARTERS WAS THE ONLY PUBLIC
DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE GOP ARRESTS AND EXILE ORDER IN
THE CAPITAL. A CROWD OF SEVERAL HUNDRED SYMPATHIZERS
BLOCKED OFF AVENIDA BALBOA AND SMALL AREA SURROUNDING
BUILDING AROUND 5:30 PM FOR THE ORGANIZATION'S MEETING
AT THAT HOUR. MEETING CONTINUED UNTIL AFTER MIDNIGHT
LAST NIGHT AND A CROWD OF APPROXIMATELY 300-400,
OVERWHELMINGLY MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS, STAYED IN
POSITION UNTIL THAT TIME. BANNERS ON THE BUILDING,
AND STRETCHED ACROSS AVE. BALBOA, DEMANDED "RESPECT
FOR INDIVIDUAL LIBERTIES" AND "FREE THE 115 PRISONERS".
(THE FIGURE 115 MAY REFER TO LARGE NUMBERS OF PERSONS
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PAGE 02 PANAMA 00475 212313Z

REPORTEDLY ARRESTED IN CHIRIQUI.)

3. VARIOUS SPEAKERS (INCLUDING ONE OF THE WEEDEN BROTHERS, AND ALBERTO QUIROS GUARDIA'S SON) ADDRESSED THE CROWD AND DENOUNCED THE ARRESTS AND EXILE ORDER AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. COMMUNISTS IN THE GOVERNMENT WERE DECRIED, AND THE GOVERNMENT BLAMED FOR THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES OF THE COUNTRY. MAIN THRUST, HOWEVER, OF SPEECHES WAS CIVIL LIBERTIES-FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND PRESS, WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO THE REPORTED "DEFINITIVE" CLOSING OF QUIROS GUARDIA'S RADIO IMPACTO. ONE SPEAKER DECLARED THE MEETING TO BE THE FIRST EXPRESSION OF DISSENT AFTER "7 YEARS OF SILENCE, 7 YEARS OF DICTATORSHIP."

4. APEDE RESOLUTIONS, APPROVED TOWARDS MIDNIGHT, PRINTED IN HAND-OUT WHICH IS CIRCULATING THROUGH PANAMA CITY THIS MORNING. MOST IMPORTANT OF THE RESOLUTIONS CALLS FOR AN INDEFINITE BUSINESS STOPPAGE (PARO EMPRESARIAL INDEFINIDO) UNTIL GOP RECALLS EXILES AND AGREES TO RESPECT CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES OF PERSONAL FREEDOM AND DUE PROCESS OF LAW. (SEPTTEL COVERS HANDOUT IN MORE DETAIL.)

5. THE CROWD WAS QUIET AND WELL-BEHAVED. THE NATIONAL GUARD MADE NO VISIBLE ATTEMPT TO BREAK UP THE GATHERING. (SEPTTEL FOLLOWS ON BUSINESS RESPONSE TO APEDE CALL)
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